



# What Is Heaven Like?

September 17-23, 2023

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## **MAIN POINT**

The hope of heaven in the future should impact the way we live today.

## **INTRODUCTION**

When you think about heaven, what images come to mind?

What shaped your images of heaven?

How often do you think about heaven? Why do you think this is?

Every Christian is on a journey to a place called heaven—a one-way trip that will last for eternity. The subjects of death, judgment, heaven, and hell are often daunting to consider. Most people choose to ignore these topics because they believe they have long lives ahead of them. However, Scripture addresses these inevitable realities on a regular basis. This is why we're committing the next six weeks to gain a better understanding of the place Jesus has prepared for us and to bring heaven closer to our hearts, minds, and everyday lives.

## **UNDERSTANDING**

**READ [ECCLESIASTES 9:12](#) AND [JAMES 4:14](#).**

What emotions or feelings do you have when you think about death?

Why could considering death be productive?

What has informed your thoughts on death? Family background? The Bible? Other religious knowledge? Personal loss?

Why are we so often consumed with what will happen tomorrow?

How has planning for the future caused you to miss opportunities God has given you today?

Learning to number our days means we live with the understanding that our time on earth is limited and is expiring with every passing moment. Taking an eternal perspective on our minutes, hours, and days allows us to exercise wisdom in the way we spend our time. Numbering our days helps us live with the end in mind.

**READ [MATTHEW 7:13-14](#) AND [REVELATION 20:11-15](#).**

Why do you suppose Jesus said the road to destruction is wide and broad, while the road to life is narrow? How have you seen this truth play out in your experience?

Why do we need the truth of verses like these even though they may make us uncomfortable?

Why should the certainty of judgment motivate us to live zealously for God and to share the gospel passionately with the lost?

All of us are born on the road of rebellion. All people have found the road to destruction; it's well-traveled. To find the narrow gate or the way of Jesus, we must make a decision to make a spiritual U-turn. The Bible calls this reversal "repentance." Repentance is a change of mind that leads to a change of direction. Only when people admit that they're on the wrong road can they discover the right road.

Jesus claimed to be the way, the truth, and the life (see [John 14:6](#)). Jesus is the only way to find the narrow road. He alone has the keys to the gates to either eternal judgment in hell or eternal salvation in heaven.

The certainty of judgment lies behind each gate. [Hebrews 9:27](#) states, "It is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment." There's no escaping the fact that all of us—Christians and non-Christians alike—will face God's judgment when we arrive at the end of our lives on earth.

### **READ [1 CORINTHIANS 3:12-15](#) AND [REVELATION 19:7-8](#).**

**Why did Paul use the analogy of fire as a purifier that reveals the spiritual work we do in our lives? What truly matters to God at the end of our lives?**

**What's the connection between wearing fine linen wedding clothing and our righteous acts done on earth?**

The church is the bride of Christ. Like a bride on her wedding day, we want to offer ourselves to our bridegroom as pure and presentable. This means we must take care to live consistent, ethical lives that prepare us to meet our Savior.

No one today would argue that we live in an increasingly sinful world. We're surrounded by messages and images of immorality, rebellion, and lawlessness that make it hard to keep our character clean and to stay away from the saturation and stench of sin. This daily struggle gets more and more difficult as the days go by. Yet one of the best ways to keep our lives spotless is by allowing our longing for heaven to drive us to be clothed with the pure, righteous character of Christ.

### **READ [2 CORINTHIANS 4:17-18](#).**

**What was Paul communicating about eternity in these verses?**

**Why is taking an eternal perspective on struggles hard for us?**

We certainly have struggles and heartaches in this world that we feel may never end, yet Paul said that, compared to eternity, these agonies are only momentary. Our afflictions, no matter how unbearable they may seem at the time, are light when compared to the weight of heaven.

Heaven is the promise that God will eventually make all things right and that He will one day fulfill our deepest longings. Although God's promise is still in the future, it should make a tremendous difference in our lives today. The hope of heaven is that all creation will receive what it has long desired: freedom from the crushing oppression of sin.

## **APPLICATION**

**When are you most likely to consider the brevity and fragility of your life?**

**Why should these realities cause you to think more seriously about heaven?**

How can we focus on living a pure life without trying to earn our way into heaven?

How does the hope of heaven affect our perspective on suffering (death, tragedy, in justice, etc.)? When has this hope helped you personally?

## **PRAYER**

Thank God for the promise of heaven. Ask Him for the strength to live for Him today.

## **COMMENTARY**

### **ECCLESIASTES 9:12**

**9:11-12** Another aspect of our mortality is that we are governed by time and circumstances. Ecclesiastes does not deny the sovereignty of God over human affairs. The Teacher asserts that no matter how capable we are, many things are beyond our control. Above all, the moment of death is not ours to choose.

### **JAMES 4:14**

**4:13-14** In a hypothetical but realistic scenario, James accused a merchant who had big designs on making a profit of leaving God out of his plans. Neglecting to entrust our hopes and plans to God and His counsel is paramount to arrogance and unbelief. If He is really the Lord of our lives, we see all things as coming from His hands and we speak of plans and outcomes accordingly.

### **MATTHEW 7:13-14**

**7:13-14** The narrow gate symbolizes the exclusive nature of Christ's kingdom. Entrance requires the disciple to do the will of the Father in heaven ([v. 21](#)). The gate that is wide indicates that hell grants unrestricted entrance and that many will enter through its gates. The difficult (lit "narrow") ...road may symbolize the life of hardship and persecution that the disciple must face. However, since Jewish literature often used the symbol of the road to represent a moral path ([Judges 2:22](#); [Isaiah 30:21](#); [Jeremiah 6:16](#); [2John 6](#)) and because the law was portrayed as a narrow road from which a person was not to deviate ([Deuteronomy 5:32](#); [17:20](#); [28:14](#); [Joshua 1:7](#); [2Kings 22:2](#)), the narrow road probably represents Jesus' morally restrictive teaching. The wide road permits travelers to meander and pursue worldly desires, but the narrow path requires travelers to stick to God's will ([Matthew 7:21](#)).

### **REVELATION 20:11-15**

**20:11-15** The phrase great white throne emphasizes God's purity and holiness in judging and His sovereign right to both rule and judge the earth. The phrases earth and heaven fled and no place was found for them apparently refer to "the first heaven and the first earth" giving way at the final judgment to "a new heaven and a new earth" ([21:1](#)). The dead... standing before the throne come to life in the "second resurrection" ([implied in v. 5](#)). There are two sets of books at this judgment. The names of all believers are in the book of life. The names of the "earth dwellers" are not in the book of life ([13:8](#); [17:8](#)). They are judged according to their works, which are recorded in the other books. No one can ever be saved by works, because that would leave room for human boasting ([Ephesians 2:8-9](#)). The eternal dwelling place of all unbelievers is the lake of fire. As part of the present creation, Death and Hades are also thrown into the lake of fire.

### **1 CORINTHIANS 3:12-15**

**3:10d-12** With the word For (Gk gar; introducing an explanation), Paul explained how future builders must build on the foundation that he had already laid. As a "skilled master builder" (v. 10), Paul issued a warning (as found in construction contracts) to any builder-leader who

should follow him to be careful how he builds, choosing to use only quality materials, which is symbolic of faithfulness to his God-given duties as builder of God's church. The urgent reason for this diligence is revealed in verses 13-17.

**3:13** Even in the ancient world large buildings were required to be tested and approved. Stipulations within the building contract stated when the inspection day would take place. Paul used the exact words commonly used to refer to this inspection— the day will disclose it. Paul was speaking of the eschatological inspection day when God will examine how builders have built the building of God, the body of Christ, on the foundation of the “foolish message” ([1:18,23](#); [2:2,5](#)).

**3:14-17** In this section Paul gives three different scenarios describing three different types of subcontractors who were constructing the building of God. He begins each scenario with the expression if anyone's work... if anyone (vv. 14-15,17; cp. v. 12).

### **[REVELATION 19:7-8](#)**

**19:6-8** The praise of the vast multitude as a heavenly choir now turns to (1) the coming reign of the Lord and (2) the joyful marriage of the Lamb. The wife of the Lamb (Christ) is the church ([Ephesians 5:31-32](#)), those redeemed from all nations ([Revelation 5:9-10](#); [7:9](#)) by His blood ([1:5-6](#); [5:9-10](#)). Since these descriptions are equally true of the vast multitude ([7:9](#); [19:1,6](#)) and the “heaven dwellers” ([12:12](#); [13:6](#)), it appears that there is a shift in imagery from the same group of people being portrayed as a choir to being the wife of the Lamb.

### **[2 CORINTHIANS 4:17-18](#)**

**4:17-18** These verses contain three pairs of opposites. These also contrast the experiences of frail humanity with the evidences of God's power.